

Features | Rearview Mirror

Hawaii has had close relationship with military for decades

By Bob Sigall, Special to the Star-Advertiser

COURTESY BOB SIGALL - Fearing a Japanese invasion, the U.S. government replaced all currency in the islands with notes marked "HAWAII."

COURTESY TRIPLER ARMY MEDICAL CENTER - The original Tripler hospital was part of Fort Shafter in 1907.

COURTESY TRIPLER ARMY MEDICAL CENTER - McKinley High School students raised enough money selling war bonds during WWII to buy a B-24 Liberator bomber. It had Madame Pele coming out of a volcano painted on either side.

COURTESY TRIPLER ARMY MEDICAL CENTER - In 1920 the Fort Shafter Hospital was renamed for Brig. Gen. Charles Stuart Tripler, who directed the Union Army's medical program during the Civil War.

Maj. Gen. Arthur Logan spoke to my Rotary club recently. He's an adjutant general in charge of the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency. He had a few interesting things to say that I thought my readers would enjoy.

First, he said that 10 years ago when many Hawaii National Guardsmen were in Iraq, they got into trouble for using the shaka sign. I went to our newspaper archives and found that a National Guard soldier gave a shaka to a general instead of a salute. The general took umbrage, the 2005 article said, and banned its use.

Further research showed me there was more to the story. While salutes to superior officers are the tradition, at guard posts a salute could identify officers to the enemy and potentially make them a target. That could make shakas the safe choice.

As a joke, some units created an unofficial "Rules of Engagement for Shaka Use." One of them said, "You are authorized to return shaka if shaka'd upon first," and another stated, "Shaka must only be directed at the person who initiated the shaka."

A few other local soldiers at Camp Victory in Iraq posted a "Hawaiian Word of the Day" on a slate board in front of a palace they guarded. The effort became popular and brought many smiles to passers-by.

Logan mentioned another funny story to our club. He said that in the aftermath of Hurricane Iniki, which particularly damaged Kauai in 1992, civil defense workers were concerned with looting of banks and gun shops.



Instead, Logan said, thieves looted a warehouse filled with beer.

His talk reminded me that Hawaii has had a close relationship with the military for many decades, yet there are many interesting military stories the public doesn't know.

PEARL HARBOR

For instance, what did Hawaii get for giving Pearl Harbor to the U.S. Navy?

It was part of a deal with the United States to lower tariffs between it and the kingdom in 1875. The tariffs were hurting the islands' sugar industry. King David Kalakaua offered the U.S. Pearl Harbor to "sweeten" the offer.

The U.S. sent Gen. John Schofield to Hawaii to take a look at the harbor. He told them the entire U.S. and British fleets could easily anchor in the harbor, if the mouth was dredged sufficiently.

When the Reciprocity Treaty was signed in 1875, the sugar industry began to take off. But now that sugar is pau, do we get Pearl Harbor back? I doubt it.

SCHOFIELD BARRACKS

On Dec. 4, 1908, Capt. Joseph Castner established the Waianae-Uka military reservation.

Some referred to it as Castner Village or the Leilehua Barracks. Four months later, in April 1909, it was renamed Schofield Barracks.

A fort defends itself. A barracks houses troops that defend another place. What was Schofield Barracks designed to defend?

Back then it was thought an enemy might land on the North Shore and travel over Central Oahu and attack Pearl Harbor from land. Schofield Barracks would protect against that.

Bob Hope entertained at Schofield Barracks many times and liked to joke that its mission was to protect surfers.

In the 1930s the newspapers said Schofield Barracks was Hawaii's second-largest city.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower stated during a 1946 visit that Schofield Barracks was "the most important single base the U.S. has in the world."

ALOHA TOWER

Aloha Tower was painted with camouflage colors to "hide" it from our enemies during World War II.

"HAWAII" CURRENCY

Fearing a Japanese invasion after Pearl Harbor, the government removed all U.S. currency from circulation. It replaced it with special 1933 and 1934 silver certificates with the word "HAWAII" overprinted on the back.

This way, if the Japanese did invade, the U.S. could "demonitize" that currency.

Rather than risk shipping \$200 million to \$300 million in bills to the mainland, it was decided to burn them at the crematorium at Oahu Cemetery.

After several weeks of burning, the military realized the crematorium was too slow and burned the rest of the bills at Oahu Sugar in Aiea.

ELVIS PRESLEY

Elvis Presley helped raise money to build the USS Arizona Memorial. Fundraising for the memorial had stalled in 1961, and Elvis agreed to perform at Bloch Arena to help.

Elvis and his manager paid, out of their own pockets, \$54,000 in travel, hotel, food and other expenses so that 100 percent of the concert ticket sales went to the Arizona Memorial.

The concert raised nearly \$100,000 – the largest single donation – and generated tremendous publicity for the project. The memorial opened a little over a year later, on Memorial Day in 1962.

MCKINLEY HIGH SCHOOL

McKinley High School students raised enough money selling war bonds in 1943 and '44 to buy a bomber for the military. Their goal was to sell \$100,000, but they sold over \$350,000 worth of the bonds — the equivalent of over \$4.5 million today.

A B-24 Liberator bomber was purchased with the money. It had a picture of Madame Pele coming out of a volcano on the sides of the plane. The bomber saw action in the South Pacific before being recycled into pots and pans after the war.

CAMP MCKINLEY

Speaking of McKinley, the first U.S. military post in the islands was a temporary one: Camp McKinley. It was located at the Kapiolani Park racetrack in 1898. The camp was used by troops on their way to the Philippines to fight in the Spanish-American War.

Because of this, the U.S. saw that Hawaii was in a strategically important place, and this led to our annexation.

COL. BILLY MITCHELL

Col. Billy Mitchell was the first to predict the Japanese would bomb Pearl Harbor one Sunday morning at 7:30 a.m. He made his prediction in 1923, before there were aircraft carriers.

Mitchell suggested 100 Japanese planes could fly to Midway island and be refueled by submarines.

They would then fly to Niihau, refuel and attack on a Sunday morning at 7:30 a.m. There were no radios on Niihau back then.

The War Department dismissed his report, but he was able to convince the Robinson family to plow Niihau island's flat areas to prevent its use as an airfield. Fifty square miles were crisscrossed with the furrows. It took three men eight years.

Billy Mitchell died in 1935, before he could learn he was wrong.

When the Japanese attacked in 1941, it was on a Sunday morning at 7:55 a.m. — not 7:30.

TRIPLER GENERAL HOSPITAL

Fort Shafter dates to 1907. In 1920 the Fort Shafter Hospital was renamed Tripler General Hospital in honor of Civil War Brig. Gen. Charles Stuart Tripler.

Tripler was the Union Army's first medical director and penned a "Manual of the Medical Officer of the Army of the United States" that was prized by those who happened to possess it.

Tripler General Hospital's original location was across King Street from Fort Shafter, where Moanalua Road is today.

The current Tripler opened in 1948. About 100 patients were moved to the new facility in less than 90 minutes by "a large convoy of ambulances with their lights ablaze."

Former KHON newsman Ray Lovell reported in 1995 that Tripler was painted a variety of pink called "rose coral" to hide Hawaii's red dirt, which might blow on and discolor a white hospital.

THE USS MISSOURI AND KALAUPAPA

Few know there's a special relationship between the Mighty Mo and one particular island community: Kalaupapa.

It began in 1908 when the U.S. sent an armada of 16 ships, including an earlier USS Missouri, on a 14-month, 43,000-mile around-the-world voyage. It made 20 ports of call, including Honolulu from July 16 to July 22, 1908.

Former Civil War veteran Brother Joseph Dutton, who continued St. Damien's work at Kalaupapa when he died, wrote to President Theodore Roosevelt.

The people of Kalaupapa feel forgotten, Dutton told him. It would mean a great deal to them if the fleet would pass Kalaupapa on its voyage.

Roosevelt agreed.

As the armada passed, its flags were lowered as a show of respect for the residents of the colony and the work Damien had done there. Residents put American flags on their roofs and waved.

Since then the USS Missouri has visited Kalaupapa and invited residents aboard. When the Missouri was being towed to Hawaii in 1998, it passed within a mile of Kalaupapa, and its residents were the first to see its arrival in Hawaii waters.

Bob Sigall, author of “The Companies We Keep” series of books, looks through his collection of old photos to tell stories of Hawaii people, places and companies. Contact him via email at sigall@yahoo.com.